

Disability Customer Survey 2002

Final Report

6 February 2003

By

**Dr Pauline Conroy
Aoife Brennan B.Soc.Sc**

Ralaheen Ltd

Commissioned by Research and Planning Division
Tender reference number 1745/162

Acknowledgements

This report was undertaken with the support of the Research and Planning Division of FÁS. The authors are grateful to Mr Roger Fox, Director of Research and Ms Aisling Byrne, Research Officer for their helpful suggestions and technical briefing. Staff at FÁS training centres in Galway, Limerick, Cork and Dublin kindly agreed to co-operate in this customer survey. The contributions of the many users of FÁS services who gave freely of their time and agreed to be interviewed is gratefully acknowledged. An enthusiastic interview team made the study a very collaborative effort. Interviewing was undertaken by Ms Geraldine Grindley, Ms Maire O’Leary, Mr Sean Meagher, and Ms Helen O’Leary. Their willingness to travel considerable distances enabled the survey to include the views of users outside urban centres. Survey fieldwork was co-ordinated by Ms Aoife Brennan, research assistant to the project.

Table of Contents

Executive Summary		1
Chapter 1	Introduction	
	1.1 Survey background	2
	1.2 Disability in the labour force	3
	1.3 The approach to the survey	4
	1.4 Conceptualising the customer	4
	1.5 Availing of a range of programmes	5
	1.6 Hard-to-reach populations	6
Chapter 2	Survey Method	
	2.1 The choice of method	7
	2.2 The survey population	7
	2.3 The Questionnaire	8
	2.4 The Interviewers	8
	2.5 Analysing the results	8
	2.6 Discussions with FÁS Staff	9
Chapter 3	Findings from FÁS Customers	
	3.1 Profile of customers	10
	3.2 Age of customers	10
	3.3 Education of customers	11
	3.4 Employment of customers	11
	3.5 Customer perceptions of restrictions	13
	3.6 Making contact with FÁS and expectations	13
	3.7 Satisfaction with the registration process	14
	3.8 Awareness of registration environment	14
	3.9 Customers views on interview with FÁS	15
	3.10 Experiences of referral	16
	3.11 Customer Rationale for coming to FÁS	17
	3.12 Satisfaction levels with FÁS services	18
	3.13 Experiences of placements	18
	3.14 Flawed referrals from service providers	19
	3.15 Communication between employers and FÁS	19
	3.16 Experiences of follow-up	20
	3.17 Expectations for the future	21

Chapter 4	Findings from FÁS Staff	
	4.1 Staff	22
	4.2 Registration	22
	4.3 Placement	23
	4.4 The management of disability	24
	4.5 Follow-up	25
	4.6 Social welfare exemptions	25
	4.7 FÁS and disability	26
Chapter 5	Analysis and Conclusions	
	5.1 Mainstreaming policy in FÁS	27
	5.2 Identifying FÁS customers with disabilities	27
	5.3 Issues of self declaration of disability	27
	5.4 Missing FÁS customers with disabilities	28
	5.5 Customer satisfaction	28
	5.6 Customer dissatisfaction	28
	5.7 Accommodations and adaptations	29
	5.8 Offering choices to customers	29
	5.9 Placement outcomes for FÁS customers	30
	5.10 Customers with a history of mental health difficulties	30
	5.11 The management of disability by FÁS	30
Chapter 6	Recommendations	
	6.1 Identifying the customer	31
	6.2 Communicating to potential customers	31
	6.3 Management of disability	31
	6.4 Customers Interview with FÁS	31
	6.5 Handling of Social Welfare Benefits	32
	6.6 The FÁS customers disability client base	32
	6.7 Accommodations and Adaptations	32
	6.8 Follow-up	32
	6.9 Customer ‘word-of-mouth’	32
Appendix 1	Additional Methodological Material	
Appendix 2	FÁS offices cited by users in study	
Appendix 3	Inaccessible Offices as Reported by FÁS Customers	
Appendix 4	Summary of Findings	
Appendix 5	Summary Outline of Process Recommended by Employment Service Officers	
Appendix 6	Questionnaire	

Table of Tables

Table 1	Customer survey population	7
Table 2	Level of education attained by customers, by region 2002	11
Table 3	Selected demographic characteristics of FÁS interviewees 2002	12
Table 4	Referrals per customer and who attended interviews	16
Table 5	Placement outcomes as viewed by FÁS interviewee	

Executive Summary

FÁS, the Training and Employment Authority, under the auspices of the Department of Enterprise Trade and Employment, took over responsibility for all vocational training and employment services for people with disabilities in June 2000. This policy change meant that vocational training and employment services, formerly administered by the National Rehabilitation Board, on behalf of the Department of Health and Children were, from then on, administered by FÁS. The policy decision involved implementation of the principle of mainstreaming labour market services for people with disabilities.

Two years on in 2002, FÁS commissioned a customer survey to obtain feedback from people with disabilities around the country who had experienced the new configuration of services. The customer survey using qualitative methods, was conducted by one-to-one interviews with service users in Dublin, Galway, Cork and Limerick. The customers had used the services of 28 different FÁS offices. A number of ESOs¹ co-operated in the research.

The findings showed that customers with disabilities were generally satisfied with the reception, advice and guidance offered by FÁS as they decided whether to pursue a job, vocational training or other labour market placements. Service users appreciated individualised customer treatment and help with filling out the registration form, as well as the information and confidence boost they received. The majority of customers would recommend using FÁS to others.

A proportion of users expressed concerns with inaccessible offices or buildings and with the prospect of waiting lists and training assessments. Some customers reported uncertainty as to what they could or should aim for. A number were unsure whether to try and enter the labour force. Customers reported an interest in more intensive follow-up of their training or placement.

A minority of customers were in paid employment at the time of interview. This is consistent with trends from the most recent national study of the employment rates of people with disabilities in Ireland conducted by the Central Statistics Office. A significant number of customers were offered referrals to training or other options.

The survey found that a range of options for customers with disabilities may not be available in all regions. This would include mainstream training courses with accommodations for trainees with disabilities, Community Employment and private sector job placements.

The 2002 customer survey recommended a review of the disclosure arrangements for customers with disabilities, additional training days for placement staff, an increase in technical back-up for complex placements and a greater attention to follow-up of customers with disabilities.

¹ ESOs (Employment Service Officers) are interchangeable with Placement Officers throughout this report.

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Survey background

FÁS, the Training and Employment Authority, under the auspices of the Department of Enterprise Trade and Employment, took over responsibility for all vocational training and employment services for people with disabilities in June 2000. This meant that vocational training and employment services, formerly administered by the National Rehabilitation Board, on behalf of the Department of Health and Children were, from then on, administered by FÁS. This policy decision involved implementation of the principle of mainstreaming labour market services for people with disabilities.

A number of significant new developments followed from this policy decision. People with disabilities could benefit from the full range of programmes and services to find and prepare for employment. A number of specific steps were taken in this direction:

- Training allowances for people with disabilities were standardised, to eliminate anomalies,
- A costs of disability additional bonus was introduced for people with disabilities in FÁS training,
- Funding for disabled job seekers was strengthened and schemes more widely advertised,
- A Supported Employment Programme was launched,
- Investment was made in the knowledge base of vocational training staff in relation to specific impairments and the corresponding adjustments or accommodations that might be required to enable individuals to participate to the maximum of their capacity in work, training or other experiential labour market options, preparations and orientations.

Two years on in 2002, FÁS commissioned a customer survey to obtain feedback from people with disabilities around the country who had experienced the new configuration of services. Ralaheen Ltd, a social research company with some experience of research in the field of disability was invited to undertake the customer survey.

1.2 Disability in the labour force

The labour force participation rate of people with disabilities or long-standing health problems was 43 per cent in 2002.² This compares with a rate of 68 per cent for the State as a whole. The participation rate of people with disabilities is well below the rate of people without disabilities. There is a gap of 25 percentage points in the participation rate between those with and without disabilities. Excluding those in the younger (at school/training) and older age groups (close to retirement) from the calculations of participation, changes the picture. The participation rate of people with disabilities aged 25 to 54 years rises to 51 per cent compared with 80 per cent for the State as a whole. This is a gap of almost 30 percentage points.

The labour force participation rate of people with disabilities in Ireland had been estimated at 33 per cent of those aged 16 to 64. These estimates were based on data deriving from 1996 and so predated, the employment expansion in Ireland between 1995 and 2000. This was less than half the rate of participation of persons without a disability. The participation rate difference between the two categories of labour market actors was 35 percentage points for this earlier period.³

A calculation of employment rates gives a more precise picture for labour market policy. Just over 40 per cent of all persons with a disability/long-standing health problem indicated that they were in employment in 2002 compared with an employment participation rate for the population as a whole of 65 per cent.⁴

The low participation rates are mirrored in other nearby labour markets such as in Northern Ireland.⁵ Outside the open labour market, there has been a long tradition of relatively segregated, protected or sheltered employment environments, sometimes with weak interactions with other certified vocational training and labour market measures.⁶ These traditions can generate specific blocks to the meeting of supply and demand on the labour market.⁷ The Quarterly National Household Survey reveals that 92 per cent of those with a disability/long-standing health problem in employment reported receiving no assistance to facilitate their work. Findings on employment assistance for persons with

² Quarterly National Household Survey, Disability in the Labour Force, 2002, CSO, 28 November, 2002.

³ Commission (2001) *The Employment situation of people with disabilities in the European Union*, Brussels.

⁴ *Quarterly National Household Survey*, 28 November 2002. page 1

⁵ Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (2001) *Disabled people in the labour market, key facts and figures from the Labour Force Survey, Disability Briefing*, Belfast.

⁶ NACTE Steering Group (1997) *Employment Challenges for the Millennium*, National Rehabilitation Board, Dublin.

⁷ P.Conroy, S.Fannagan (2001) *The Effective Recruitment of People with Disabilities into the Public Services*, Equality Authority, Dublin.

1.3 The approach to the survey

As part of its labour market and vocational training monitoring and internal functions, FÁS gathers large amounts of data on the movement of people towards and through the labour market. It is possible for FÁS to closely and quantitatively measure the outcomes of specific training and labour market interventions, programmes and measures. The goal of this research was to focus on more qualitative dimensions of relationships between users and FÁS services, from a user perspective. The feedback of users or customers is of interest to future service planning, to testing the effectiveness of new measures, and to gauging the extent to which the users self-perceived needs and expectations can be met by FÁS services.

FÁS services to and for people with disabilities have been integrated into the mainstream of service provision. This has involved making adjustments and accommodations across the board at many levels of provision so that people with disabilities can avail of services on an equal footing with other service users. It has involved developing programmes of specific or positive action in favour of people with disabilities, or training staff or employers to compensate for the absence of generalised knowledge or provision in relation to disability, in the past. The customer survey to obtain feedback was undertaken during this transitional mainstreaming period of 2000-2002.

1.4 Conceptualising the customer

The culture of the 'customer' who explores and considers different options, who can take advice and reflect on options, as well as reject some in favour of others, is a relatively new situation for many people with disabilities. People with disabilities have always availed of FÁS services, however this is the first time that FÁS has full responsibility for all training and employment services for people with disabilities.

People with disabilities who have experienced being referred back and forth between public services regardless of need, qualification or inclination, may not know that they are customers with choices and options. The survey had to present itself in situations where users are not accustomed to, or have never been asked for feedback on services received. Some users did not know that they were FÁS customers. Their registration with FÁS had been undertaken by a third party, such as a not-for-profit body.⁸ The survey was therefore designed to allay any fears of FÁS customers/users with disabilities that it was inappropriate to make comment on services.

⁸ This practice is now (mid 2002) ended and all FÁS users register face-to-face as customers.

1.5 Availing of a range of programmes

Customers of FÁS with or without disabilities may avail, or be advised to avail of, a wide range of options to prepare for employment and to take up employment. These range from occupational guidance and counselling services, through Community Employment Schemes, work experience, jobs clubs, traineeships and FÁS Training Courses. FÁS has contracts with specialist agencies who provide training and with consortia which promote and develop the employment of people with disabilities. While this is organisationally clear to service providers, this is not always the case for the user or consumer.

The Customer Survey attempts, through interviews, to accompany the user as they recall their experiences at different points of the process of service usage. This is sometimes called the ‘pathways’ approach. The interviewee is invited, by questions or prompting, to move from a ‘remote’ point in the integration process, step by step, to the destination point.

1.6 Hard-to-reach populations

People with disabilities are a hard-to-reach survey population. They are remote from the open labour market in many senses. Remoteness can take the form of physical and geographical isolation and difficulties of mobility combined with poorly accessible services. The frequent absence of adjustments and accommodations for sensory impaired persons can place them outside the orbit of services despite the customer's best efforts to connect by Braille, Sign, or talking software.

The concept 'hard-to-reach' is used in US social research. It is used in particular by Mathematica Policy Research Inc.⁹ in their large scale studies for Federal agencies providing services to large populations. The concept does not presume any exclusion on the part of the participant, and is neutral with regard to discrimination. It conceptualises the technical difficulties to be overcome on the part of research agencies in ensuring high response rates and representative samples.

The remoteness of people with disabilities is an economic fact. People with disabilities have had restricted opportunities in the past to contribute to the open labour market. Their measured labour force participation is low. Thus, many people with disabilities have not experienced open employment, mainstream industrial training, consultations with employment and recruitment agencies and the other many forms of labour force preparation and placement that are currently available. People with disabilities or their carers and advocates may self-define themselves as outside the labour market or define themselves as attached to a particular specialised training centre or workshop.

⁹ Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. Washington D.C. US.

Chapter 2

Survey Method

2.1 The choice of method

The primary aim of this study is to understand and assess the quality of services provided to people with disabilities who register with FÁS. Accordingly, a qualitative approach is deemed to be most appropriate in this instance. Qualitative research requires the interviewer to be personally involved in the fieldwork, to hear what the respondents are saying and probe areas that are important to the overall project. This type of interviewing is typically loosely structured, making use of a broad topic guide and having the primary aim of encouraging respondents to express themselves as fully and freely as possible. Sample sizes tend to be small, and it is not usually either possible or desirable to derive comparative measurement from this approach, but what is gained is insight and understanding of motives and attitudes.

2.2 The survey population

The survey population was persons with disabilities who had registered with FÁS in the first quarter of 2002 at a mixed range of FÁS offices across Ireland. The population was both urban and rural and included Eastern, Southern and Western regions of Ireland. FÁS compiled printed lists of names, addresses and phone numbers of persons who had registered with FÁS. The survey population was further refined to aim to interview 15 persons with disabilities in each of Galway, Cork and Limerick regions and 30 persons in the greater Dublin region. From the printed lists, interviewers made telephone contacts with persons from the lists, choosing a mix of locations and sexes. The range of impairments experienced by customers ranged across sensory (hearing and sight) impairment, mobility impairments (back injury, walking) through to intellectual and psychological impairments. A total of 68 customers were interviewed across the regions. A balance of 60/40 between male and female interviewees was achieved.

In conformity with the Data Protection Act, 1998, the lists of persons contained no details whatsoever of the persons background, educational experiences, impairment or injury or personal details.

Table 1 Customer survey population

Region	Numbers of FÁS Customers Interviewed	Numbers of FÁS Staff Interviewed
Dublin	30	4
Galway	12	2
Cork	11	2
Limerick	15	2
Total interviewed	68	10

N= 78

2.3 The Questionnaire

FÁS provided detailed guidance for the compilation of a questionnaire which would capture the pathway from registration to labour market destination. The questionnaire scope was provided to identify points/moments at which customers encountered difficulties in using or accessing services or at which they withdrew from reception of services. (See Appendix 6) The FÁS guidance was used to formulate a survey questionnaire together with other sources of guidance.

2.4 The Interviewers

A team of six interviewers were assembled to interview in each regional location. Interviewers were male and female and interviewed alone. Each interviewer had a background in one of the social sciences: general social science, social policy, psychology, education, or sociology. In addition, five of the six interviewers had experience of interviewing or working with people with disabilities or children with special needs.

2.5 Analysing the results

The 68 completed survey schedules were returned to Ralaheen Ltd by the interviewing team. There, they were checked and quantitative results analysed. Each interviewee was provided with a code number to preserve anonymity. Data was entered with one of four regional location codes to enable results to be analysed by region.

Telephone discussions, e-mail exchanges and face to face exchanges took place with interviewers during and after the fieldwork to deepen the impressions they gained during the interviews. Comment sections were read and discussed to explore the relationships emerging or being articulated across the replies/conversations with customers.

2.6 Discussions with FÁS Staff

Discussions were held with ten FÁS staff in four locations to explore their experiences of the programmes, initiatives and provisions to implement the mainstreaming of services to people with disabilities – customers of FÁS. The FÁS staff were from divisions and sections involved in the field of disability in different regions of FÁS. This is significant. The labour market and infrastructure supports for people with disabilities have developed quite differently in various regions. This uneven historical context can be expected to interact in diverse ways with the new mainstreaming principle of FÁS operations.

Given the small number of interviewees, and the emergent nature of the topic, it was decided that exchanges with FÁS staff should take the form of discussions rather than interviews. The principal themes addressed in these discussions are incorporated into chapter 4. (See Appendix 1 for further details of methodology used in study).

Chapter 3

Findings from FÁS Customers

3.1 Profile of customers

The customers interviewed for the research represented a broad cross section of customers aged from 15 to 64. Some 60 per cent of FÁS registrants interviewed were male and 40 per cent were female.

3.2 Age of customers

FÁS registrants in the age bracket, 15-24, accounted for 11 per cent of the survey population. (See Table 3) Of the 11 per cent, two customers had no formal education, Primary level education was attained by two customers, two other customers attained leaving certificate education. Non-university level was attained by one customer and group/junior certificate level education was attained by a further one FÁS registrant. When asked what activities they engaged in, in the past five years, the replies varied from sheltered/protected employment, job placements, life skills, work experience and two customers stated that they were in paid employment. When asked where they would hope to be in two years time, the replies were similar, ranging from *'getting a good skill'*, *'more training'*, *'more education'* to *'unsure really'*. Presently, one customer reported working for payment or profit, two customers were students, another FÁS registrant was unemployed. A further customer stated that he was unable to work.

3.3 Education of customers

A third of FÁS customers reported seriously low levels of attained education (see Table 2 below) Some 35 per cent received up to primary level only, or had no formal education. This may be a reflection of the inclusion of older age groups of customers or the failure of the education services to reach children with disabilities. Ten percent of customers attended university or third level non university attainment. From a regional perspective, the Dublin customers represented the highest level of education attained (6 per cent /third level). The Dublin region had the highest concentrations of those with no formal education (7 per cent).

FÁS customers with a disability are marginally attached to the labour market, according to the profile of study participants. Just 19 per cent described themselves as in employment.

Table 2 Level of education attained by customers, by region 2002

	Dublin %	Cork %	Galway %	Limerick %	Total %
No formal Education	7	-	-	1	8
Primary only	13	4	3	7	27
Intermediate/O Level	1.5	1.5	2.5	1.5	7
Group/Junior Cert	6	1	7	6	20
Leaving Cert	14	4	3	4	25
Non-university	-	3	-	-	3
University	6	-	-	1	7
Higher University	-	1.5	1.5	-	3
Total	47.5	15	17	20.5	100

Source: FÁS Interviews 2002
N=68

3.4 Employment of customers

Just over a third (34 per cent) of FÁS customers interviewed described their employment status as that of being unable to work (see Table 3 on next page). This is a high proportion and is in addition to those who are economically inactive due to retirement, home duties or activities other than job seeking, unemployment and working. As customers of FÁS, this one third of respondents are in contact with the labour market, but they self-define themselves as remote from the labour market. This self-defined labour market marginality is associated with lower levels of educational attainment (Table 2). The majority of the 'unable to work' have incomplete secondary education – several had none.

Table 3 Selected demographic characteristics of FÁS interviewees 2002

	%				
	Galway	Limerick	Cork	Dublin	Total %
Gender					
Male	10	12	12	26	60
Female	7	10	4	19	40
Age					
15-24	2	2	3	4	11
25-44	6	7	6	25	44
45-64	10	13	7	15	45
No response	0	0	0	0	0
Education					
No formal Education	-	1	-	7	8
Primary Education	3	7	4	13	27
Intermediate/O Level	2.5	1.5	1.5	1.5	7
Group/Junior Certificate	7	6	1	6	20
Leaving Certificate	3	4	4	14	25
Non-University	-	-	3	-	3
University	-	1	-	6	7
Higher University	1.5	-	1.5	-	3
No response	0	0	0	0	0
Employment Status					
Unable to work	8	10	6	10	34
Working for payment/profit	3	1	3	12	19
Unemployed	1	1	1	12	15
Actively looking for work	-	3	1.5	1.5	6
Student/pupil	-	-	3	3	6
Looking for first regular job	-	1.5	-	1.5	3
Engaged in home duties	2	-	-	2	4
Retired from employment	1.5	1.5	-	1	4
Engaged in other activities	1	3	1.5	1.5	7
No response	-	-	-	2	2

Source: FÁS interviews 2002

N=68

Note: percentages have been rounded up.

Note: caution should be exercised in interpreting data since numbers are small in each category

3.5 Customer perceptions of restrictions

Some 33 per cent of service users found their disability restricting, 39 per cent defined their disability as very restricting and 4 per cent did not respond to this question. The finding that a quarter of customers did not find their disability restricting can be tentatively put in context. Some customers had impairments or conditions such as temporary back injury or depression, which they did not regard as disabling. Other customers did not feel that their own conditions were restricting yet family members disagreed. There were issues surrounding the customers own perception of their disability.

The range of disabilities across the FÁS customers interviewed varied greatly. Some respondents did not consider they had a disability even though they were placed on a special needs listing. One respondent did not like telling people that he had completed a particular course with FÁS because the employer would know that he had a disability. Although 24 per cent stated that their disability was not restricting, family members present at some interviews argued that the disability was in fact extremely restricting. The results of this question are based on the perceptions of the interviewee of their own disability in the context of their daily lives. Many respondents stated that they did not dwell on their incapacity or inability to do certain tasks. Many wanted to be very positive and expressed the view that they *'get on with things regardless, I don't sit around feeling sorry for myself'*

3.6 Making contact with FÁS and expectations

Customers found recall very difficult when asked about their first visit to FÁS. The study expected to find most customers had visited between 2000 and 2002. One in ten customers said they had first visited FÁS between 1990 and 1999. Among the latter, are persons who were referred by the NRB or persons who had had periodic visits to FÁS prior to 2000. No customer had arrived following use of the FÁS website. The largest group of customers arrived through street-level calling or had been advised by someone else to go to FÁS.

In many cases the customer did not realise they had been registered with FÁS in the first place because they were not present throughout the registration process. Specialised training centres registered some customers with learning disabilities by asking the person with the disability to sign the registration form. One registrant stated, *'My Central Remedial Clinic may have registered for me. I don't remember going to the FÁS Office'*. Another interviewee replied: *'A FÁS representative in St John of Gods brought me and left me in the FÁS office for a few hours'*. A job coach explained: *'Sarah has never made contact with FÁS, the organisation made contact on her behalf. There are two job coaches working for a consortium funded by FÁS. Therefore we had to register Sarah'*.

A parent made contact on behalf of his hearing impaired son. The parent called the office to arrange the appointment with the ESO.

Some customers were very clear on their mood and thinking at the time:

'I was made redundant, I went up to the desk in the FÁS Office and put my name on the list.'

Others recalled looking around the labour market: *'Hoping that they would facilitate my disability and my interests.'* A number were drifting with no expectation and explained: *'Not a lot (of expectation). Thought may not do anything for me at all'* or *'None really. Told to report to them'* (FÁS) or *'See what was available. Wanted to make sure something suited me on a part time basis'* *'Open minded - went with no strong wish to enter labour market.'*

A few customers thought: *'FÁS might get me a job'* or they would *'Get a job out of FÁS.'* A customer understood it as follows:

'They provide the service, it is up to the individual to approach and discuss needs and then attend. It's up to the individual to go for it'

'Thought I would get the course I really wanted to do. Wanted to work with the elderly'

3.7 Satisfaction with the registration process

A large majority of customers were satisfied with their registration process (86 per cent). Most found the form easy to complete. About one in five customers had difficulties completing the form, however more than half of all customers were offered help with completing the form. One in four actually received help with completing the form. This is consistent with the education profile of customers with disabilities.

The FÁS registration form asked for a record of leaving Certificate results which was embarrassing for a customer who was a third-level graduate. He felt this information was not relevant to him.

3.8 Awareness of registration environment

Many FÁS service users could not recall or did not notice what services were available in the offices they visited. Less than half could recall/did not notice the presence of photocopying, fax, free phone, newspapers or internet. Access to a job display and to touchscreen computer facilities were the most frequently observed services. There were a small number of reports of inaccessible buildings. (See Appendix 3)

3.9 Customers views on interview with FÁS

Service users appeared at ease with their experience of being interviewed. There were no reports of experiencing being rushed. Users appreciated being offered personal one-to-one interviews. Some staff described allocating at least 45 minutes for an initial or follow-up interview for customers with disabilities. The interviews frequently tended *not* to discuss the specific supports they might need to pursue a training or integration option, (46 per cent) did not explore how impairments might impact on their training/placement participation, (35 per cent) or the accommodations/adjustments that might allow for fuller participation (44 per cent).

'Had a brief interview with the Placement Officer. Very helpful, offered me tea and coffee and helped to fill out registration form'

'CRC registered me. CRC introduced me to Placement Officer. I didn't fill out the form they did this for me'

'Made an appointment to meet a Placement Officer and was given a form to fill out.'
(Nursing Graduate)

'In order to see a Placement Officer I had to make an appointment first, I returned for my appointment and was given a registration form to fill out'

'Someone came with me from my workplace'

'I can't remember much. Had an interview with a Placement Officer'

As illustrated above, many customers were able to name the job title of the interviewer as 'Employment Service Officer' but appeared unsure as to what to expect of an Employment Service Officer.

Users themselves disclosed some of their vocational restrictions during the study. These included hearing impairments, needing a sitting job (back injury), wanting a part-time option (fatigue), a non-manual activity (partial amputation of fingers) having a chronic health condition like Multiple Sclerosis or various forms of depression.

3.10 Experiences of referral

Just over half of customers described being referred to a course, a job or a scheme (Community Employment).

Cases of FÁS registrants were identified in the research who were referred for a job/course/scheme but did not go for an interview. Some 21 per cent of those referred for a job did not go for an interview. There were 25 per cent of customers who were referred for a course but did not go for an interview and a further 13 per cent referred for a scheme but did not attend an interview. Customers recall being referred. These non-attendants had changed circumstances or switched options or had not determined to enter the labour market.

Other cases of FÁS registrants were identified in the research who were referred for a job/course/scheme and attended an interview. 21 per cent of FÁS registrants were referred to a job and attended an interview. Some 29 per cent were referred to a course and attended an interview and a further 15 per cent were referred to a scheme and attended an interview. Cases varied across the different regions. In some regions FÁS registrants would receive one referral either to a job, course or a scheme, others would receive up to two and three referrals (Limerick) to a job, course or a scheme. Referrals to a job/course or scheme spiralled from one FÁS office, or the FÁS registrant received referrals from other FÁS offices which they visited.

Table 4 Referrals per customer and who attended interviews

Number of cases per region	One referral	Two Referrals	Three Referrals	Total number of cases per region
Galway	6	1	2	14
Dublin	22	4	1	33
Limerick	2	-	10	32
Cork	10	-	-	10

Total referrals = 89

Some 58 people were offered 89 referrals. The study tracked the referrals offered to 58 persons, and found 58 customers were offered 89 referrals to jobs, schemes or courses. This would indicate that customers are being offered choices.

A customer with incomplete education described attending a specialist course attended by people with learning disabilities. He was the only one with no learning impairment and felt embarrassed and alone. Some customers in Galway described waiting four to six months to get on a training course and got fed up waiting. One individual described being referred for a mainstream training course. He was assessed and to his annoyance 'failed' the assessment. *'Their approach was wrong. They should do follow-ups not just leave things hanging in the air. I hit rock bottom. I felt hopeless.'*

A few parents of customers with intellectual disabilities described going to FÁS to get into 'the mainstream' but ended up being referred back to where they had come from - to sheltered workshops or day centres. Community Employment Schemes appeared popular for clients with a history of psychological or psychiatric difficulties. Staff interviews confirmed that such options would be reduced in scale in the future.

3.11 Customer Rationale for coming to FÁS

A number of service users came to FÁS with very general ideas not tied down to a skill or sector or occupation as the following quotes indicate:

'I was ten minutes in with the Placement Officer and explained I was interested in doing a course, had to fill out the form in the office in front of the girl'

'CRC encourage people to go up. Thought FÁS would help me'

'I didn't have an option, I needed to be registered for this course with Freshstart. Thought FÁS will give me information and give me a better chance'

'Had only come to terms with MS. Had CV, had degree and wanted job as soon as possible'

'Purely procedural that I had to register with FÁS. Was on disability benefit at the time'

Expectations of FÁS customers differed. Some customers knew exactly what they wanted to do and knew that in order to achieve this, they would have to register with FÁS.

'Hoping to do a computer course and maybe re-apply to college, because I didn't think I could nurse again'

'Didn't know - just wanted to do a course in Hotel Management.'

'I worked in the civil service for a few years. Knew they (FÁS) would assist me and I knew the system'

There was evidence from the study of drift and customers testing out FÁS. Other registrants were customers of other services and were referred to FÁS. Some came for procedural/administrative reasons.

3.12 Satisfaction levels with FÁS services

FÁS customers articulated satisfaction with the level of service they received. Eight out of ten customers expressed themselves fairly or very satisfied with FÁS services. Just three per cent were indifferent and 12 per cent dissatisfied. These relatively high levels of satisfaction fell, however when it came to follow-up contacts with FÁS.

Asked to rate their satisfaction with follow-up contacts from FÁS, customers responses were quite divided. Of those who replied, only half were satisfied to a greater or lesser degree. Under a quarter were indifferent and a minority of 15 per cent were dissatisfied with follow-up.

The areas of strongest satisfaction from customers were in improving their self-confidence, in obtaining useful advice and information and getting accurate up-to-date information. The areas where satisfaction was less experienced was in identifying job opportunities and selecting suitable careers or courses of training.

Interestingly despite these divided results, 83 per cent of respondents who gave a reply, said that they would recommend FÁS to someone else either in general or for particular services.

Some indication of the ambiguities and issues for customers with disabilities are discussed in terms of their expectations in section 3.17 (Expectations for the future)

3.13 Experiences of placements

Placement appeared to be a problematic experience for many customers. A significant proportion of customers could not report a satisfactory progression into a job or training centre or integration programme. The reasons varied from uncertainty as to what they wanted, to lack of availability of mainstream training places immediately (Galway and Limerick). From the interviews and discussion of their expectations some users did not expect, or feel ready, or wish, to progress at this moment in time. Customers expressed (somewhat general) interest in learning about computers or joining a Community Employment Scheme (especially those with psychological difficulties). In Galway, an organised Supported Employment Consortium engages with many referrals from FÁS. Users feel there is no follow-up if this does not work out for them. (See Table 4)

'It's a new life to be honest. FÁS placed me in a job for 12 hours a week, answering phones and some house keeping'

'The course was great. I enjoyed the catering course. I learned new skills. Everyone was so helpful'

'The course suited me. I was able for it. It got me up and out and mixing with others. It was an opportunity to express myself' (Fresh Start course)

'Placed me on a job. I like the work and meeting people. Nice hours'

'I was waiting for six months to get a placement on this course'

'I was placed on a graphic design course for 40 hours a week. It's an eight hour day and project based. Course director was very welcoming. Took me on a three day test run after interview and gave me small projects to work on to give me a taste. I am enjoying the course but I need a higher standard, I am a university graduate. I find the course too easy. Maybe I should look for a postgraduate course after this one in the same area.'

A few customers voiced difficulties they experienced in a training environment:

'FÁS placed me on a course. I only attended one day. I knew this course would hinder me in my recovery. Knew it would not improve my situation and would cause more health problems'

'Treated me too normally – I needed more help and assurance'

3.14 Flawed referrals from service providers

Managing customer expectations has proved to be a difficult role for FÁS ESOs, particularly when customers initiated contact with the service provider first, not realising that all options would be discussed with FÁS before referral to a course or job or scheme is made. In several cases in Cork, interviewees explained the *'bureaucratic'* nature of enrolling on some courses. Some cases went to the NTDI (National Training and Development Institute) first, before registering with FÁS. They were very interested in some courses, had an interview/chat with the director about a specific course and was verbally told that there *'shouldn't be a problem'* in getting on the course. The director explained that they had to register with FÁS first of all and then FÁS would place them on the course. The individual would then go to the FÁS office and register and may not actually get on this course, or they would have to wait. For some FÁS registrants this referral caused frustration, essentially it involved two interviews and perhaps no training at the end of the day for the FÁS registrant. *'I could have done without the hassle alright'*, said a customer.

3.15 Communication between employers and FÁS

Many FÁS registrants both in urban and rural areas, complained that FÁS sent a letter informing them of a position. When the FÁS registrant phoned the employer, the position was taken. Customers, depending on their age, would either pursue another position or just not bother after that. Similarly FÁS registrants would take information from notice

boards in FÁS offices and the position would be taken. The information was not updated by FÁS. Employers had failed to contact the FÁS office and inform them that the position was taken. *'Employers are great when they need us to look for someone, but once the position has been taken, we don't hear from them until the next time they need someone'*, reported an ESO.

3.16 Experiences of follow-up

Experiences of follow-up from FÁS customers varied. Some FÁS registrants felt that follow-up was left to the customer. ESOs stated this at the time of interview. ESOs in some offices stated that they would follow-up certain cases only and very few. Case loads and tracking procedures were some reasons for not pursuing customers. Responses from FÁS customers varied on this issue, some felt that follow-up was not applicable to their case, others stated that follow-up was necessary. In many cases this research was the only follow-up received.

In exceptional cases follow-up occurred by telephone and was appreciated greatly by the customer. The personal touch made an impact. Follow-up occurred mainly in rural regions. The FÁS registrants who received follow-up were delighted. *'Very professional. Kept in touch with me. Had given 18 months notice that I was leaving work due to a medical condition and I informed FÁS I would like to do a training course.'* *'Telephoned me to check if I was happy with my current situation. Phoned to see if there was anything else they could do'* The FÁS registrant stated at the time of interview, that it was very professional to receive follow-up.

Experiences varied for FÁS registrants regarding follow-up. *'Need the personal touch. If you know where you stand it's easier on everyone. The emotional and human aspect needs to be taken into account more.'* Registrants felt that they were *'just another number on the database at the end of the day'* and it was disheartening for some registrants, who waited to hear from the ESO, regarding a placement or a referral. When the follow-up never came, the registrant, depending on age, just gave up and did not pursue it. *'It would be nice if FÁS showed a little interest. There should be follow-up'* another registrant felt, that *'Once you are at the interview with the Placement Officer, they offer you everything, but you are being psychologically fooled. The reality is totally different. I never heard from them after that'*.

There were isolated cases where follow-up did not produce the desired result. *'No follow-up. Badly written letters. It took up to a month for FÁS to reply to my letter'*, A customer's family member said.

A system of follow-up was evident regarding placing registrants on Community Employment Schemes or courses *'When I put my name down for a course I was automatically contacted'* However the length of time it took for the place to arise was an issue in some regions, therefore follow-up in some cases did not occur for at least six months after the discussion with the ESO.

Several cases emerged both in urban and rural regions which highlighted a flawed system of follow-up, regarding upcoming job positions. This would apply to all FÁS registrants not just those with disabilities. Several registrants both in urban and rural regions were seeking employment through FÁS. *'I received a letter six weeks later regarding a job vacancy. When I called the organisation, the position had already been taken.'* In situations where the registrant was over 50 years of age, the registrant did not look for a job after that. They gave up very quickly. Other FÁS registrants received follow-up through written communication. *'I received two letters about job descriptions'*

3.17 Expectations for the future

Asked where they would like to be in two years time, FÁS customers provided some startling results. Twenty two per cent of respondents were satisfied where they were. Since we know that a very high proportion are not economically active, their replies exhibit a difficult challenge to developing labour market attachment. A minority of customers (24 per cent) had specific education and training goals such as getting more education, getting a good skill or passing an exam. A further minority wanted to move sideways in relation to their labour market attachment, such as by getting some work experience, or moving to a different (sheltered) workshop, or by being in a position to 'contribute their share'.

These reported experiences of marginality to the labour market are reinforced in reports of customers views on employment specifically. Here, one in three customers felt that this discussion did not apply to them, or were unsure of how to reply, or did not know how to reply or could not reply to such a question. However a minority (26 per cent) expressed an interest in getting a new position or skill in employment or improving their employment prospects. A full 41 per cent of customers would like simply to be in paid employment.

An interpretation of the findings indicates that customers with disabilities are simultaneously hopeful and realistic. While many customers would like to be in paid employment or to be paying their way, realistically, they have set quite tentative and modest education and training goals for themselves for the future. Bearing in mind that a significant minority of customers report having less than minimum legal standards of education or indeed no formal education, or are in older age groups, it may be that some customers have adapted their hopes to their level of educational attainment and age.

Chapter 4

Findings from FÁS Staff

4.1 Staff

This chapter which follows presents a synthesis of more than ten hours of discussions with FÁS frontline staff in Dublin, Cork, Galway and Limerick. A summary of this chapter and chapter five is located in Appendix 4 and 5. ESOs were located in seven different offices. Some had formerly worked for the National Rehabilitation Board and others had not. Staff offered their views on the registration and placement process, on the effectiveness of the new mainstreaming system and their ideas for improvements to benefit clients with disabilities. Some staff felt mainstreaming had happened '*overnight*' from their perspective and they were '*in the deep end.*' FÁS was challenged with competing priorities, disability was one of those priorities.

4.2 Registration

Several staff felt disclosure of disability was problematic. Despite their experience and qualifications, many felt apprehensive about asking if a client had a disability where it was not disclosed on the registration form or not apparent from the customer's social welfare benefit or allowance. The expertise of former NRB staff in the area of disability, were frequently found to be helpful in this regard. More hands-on training or sharing of best practice in handling and addressing disclosure would be viewed as useful and could assist harmonisation of administration. ESOs noted that few hearing or sight impaired customers presented themselves. The length of the registration form was queried as too long, this was not specific to disabilities. Staff found issues raised by customers with a history of mental illness or psychiatric hospitalisation very complex, including where the customer had high academic qualifications. Social welfare benefit status should be a 'disabled people' registration trigger but did not appear on registration forms in such a format.

4.3 Placement

The identifying of a client as having a special need raised the issue of the use of case conferencing to advance the best proposal for and with the customer. Some staff felt expert-managed case conferences would be useful, with an expert designated for each region. Others felt that training centre instructors needed to be more involved.

The use of a customised training fund could be highlighted. Clients with disabilities often had unforeseen commuting needs and could not travel to training centres on the bus. Outside Dublin, ESOs were aware that customers might not 'pass' course assessments or would be on training centre course waiting lists. This could be irritating for customers who saw no quick 'result' from registration. Matching commuting, course content, and course level was found to be quite intricate for placement staff.

The placement of clients with intellectual impairments, for example, whose productivity would be less than 100 per cent, posed economic and mathematical calculations, which some staff found extremely time consuming and perplexing. The use of the Midlands jobs call-centre was regarded as unsuited for candidates with disabilities, since staff at that centre were unlikely to be trained in specific disability issues.

While mainstreaming should mean choice for customers with disabilities, in some (non-Dublin) areas only one special needs training provider was available. This restricted training options. However the options extend beyond special needs programmes. Some customers are indeed offered referrals to a range of choices or destinations but are unable to pursue them to the interview stage.

4.4 The management of disability

Several placement staff ventured the view that disability should be re-centralised somewhat with very technical back up and support to placement staff offered from a specialised unit, which could be called-in for advice. For example some FÁS centres used advocates, some did not. Some were involved with supported employment consortia some not, some with IBEC/ICTU Workways programmes, some not. This did not make sense to staff. If such developments were good for customers, then all centres should relate to them. However, these comments relate only to positive action programmes ‘Special Disability Schemes’ and did not address mainstreaming.

Individual ESOs expressed unease that if former NRB staff left their offices, they would find themselves without ‘real’ expertise on site. Others felt they were only just getting a handle on the new ‘language’ of disability issues.

Several placement staff felt they needed more training sessions per year in disability issues.¹⁰ Two half days might suffice. These should be provided internally by FÁS at head office or at regional level and should address or demonstrate hands-on themes. Since many ESOs had now acquired formal qualifications, training should not be academic but applied within a FÁS in-house model.

ESOs spoke primarily of their specific/positive/special needs actions. ESOs appeared less confident in speaking about mainstreaming into general courses and workplaces. There is an absence of technical assessment services in the country to formulate adaptations and assistive device usage for workers and trainees with disabilities.¹¹

A family member discusses it as follows,

‘FÁS is not equipped to deal with the hearing impaired. at the assessment for the IT course. FÁS did not take any account of Hugh’s Disability’.

¹⁰ This would be to apply training received by signing, allocation of transport, technology support and technology.

¹¹ A Comhairle Centre in North Great George’s Street, Dublin was closed in 2003.

4.5 Follow-up

Most ESOs felt that follow-up of placement outcomes of customers with disabilities was relatively unknown and that the time was right to examine this topic.

From their perspective they 'lost sight' of the client on waiting lists for training or in Health Board/not-for-profit supported placements. Dublin officers were conscious that some customers were 'shopping' for choices across the city and did not want to be referred back to offices or training centres in their locality. Some training centres got a good 'name' and customers would present themselves into centre city offices to obtain training in their chosen suburb. Clients with substance abuse/psychological problems were sometimes advised to 'head-out' of the city centre for training. In this context, local offices may reflect the issues of other localities. How much follow-up was undertaken was further connected to the 'capping of case loads' for ESOs.

The data monitoring of clients with disabilities raised some interesting issues. Most staff felt that disability was not a monitoring priority compared with Employment Action Plan monitoring, which they perceived as number one priority. Customers with disabilities were tracked on par with customers in EURES or other tracking categories. Some staff suggested having dedicated data input staff available. The codes for tracking were viewed as inadequate by some staff, who noted that there were no codes on job-submission or programme decision in the computerised data sub-sets for customers with disabilities.

4.6 Social welfare exemptions

Customers with disabilities in receipt of certain social welfare benefits and allowances are required in social welfare law to obtain an exemption to allow them to pursue labour market related activities. The procedure for handling social welfare exemptions for FÁS customers changed in December 2002. Customers with disabilities from the end of 2002 will handle their own exemption. The Department of Social Welfare has conducted its own survey of customers claiming Disability Allowance.¹² In the light of that study, it is worth monitoring the new exemption policy change in order to evaluate its outcome.

¹² A total of 54 per cent of Claimants of Disability Allowance are already contacting the Department twice or three times in relation to their claim in a Customer Survey. The Department notes that '*Customers need reassurance when the claim is being processed.....certain customers may need extra attention*'. Disability Allowance Customer Survey, August 2001. Department of Social Welfare, Disability Allowance section, Longford. p.11 and 21.

4.7 FÁS and disability

A number of ESOs felt that the message from FÁS to the general public in relation to disability was unclear and should be rescrutinised. FÁS was in some regards moving ahead of employers in relation to disability and could afford to be more pro-active on the subject. Employers needed to be sold the idea of using adaptations, using the services of FÁS ESOs, while ESOs needed to connect more directly to employers and have their own 'employers manual' to guide them. Many customers with disabilities could not operate yet on the open market and needed the concerted co-operation of employers and their FÁS office.

Chapter 5

Analysis and Conclusions

5.1 Mainstreaming policy in FÁS

Survey results from customers and interviews with ESOs indicate FÁS is engaged with customers with disabilities, is developing and referring customers to services. Customers express general satisfaction with their treatment. However the same survey results indicate that the principle of mainstreaming services for customers with disabilities is not articulating itself as intended in certain respects. Tendencies can be observed for both service provision and users to veer towards an expectation of separate and segregated services for customers with disabilities. This tendency is observed where open labour market job experience, employment and vocational training is not extensively considered or explored by either customers or ESOs. Intervening to arrest such tendencies will require careful consideration by FÁS.

5.2 Identifying FÁS customers with disabilities

The survey indicates that a proportion of FÁS customers who are regarded as persons with disabilities, do not wish to be regarded as so, or do not know that they are regarded as such. While the latter group will reduce with changed procedures, the former is a quite problematic situation. Ideally, FÁS should offer specific measures to those with a disability or longstanding health condition. Some individuals with non-disabling impairments or short-term health conditions appear to be offered the benefit of specific measures for which they have no exceptional need. FÁS Staff consider identifying customer disability as a very sensitive area for them.

5.3 Issues of self declaration of disability

The effectiveness of self-declaration of disability has now been widely tested in Ireland by the Central Statistics Office in both *Census 2002* and the *Quarterly Household Survey-Disability in the Labour Force 2002*. This is a wide cultural issue involving social and psychological attitude and social identity in the society. Notwithstanding their social welfare status as claimants of disability related benefits and allowances, some customers do not regard themselves as 'disabled'. The use of the term 'disability and long standing health condition' in questionnaires by the CSO appears to partially address this topic. It may be worth encouraging the enhancement of disclosure to ESOs by alterations in terms used.

5.4 Missing FÁS customers with disabilities

The survey indicates low proportions of younger persons with disability on the FÁS customer rolls. This may be because they are absorbed by other programmes, by education, the not-for-profit sector or are still at home or in residential centres. Few customers with hearing or sight impairment presented themselves during the survey or appear to present themselves to FÁS placement staff. They are underrepresented in the study and perhaps among customers.¹³

5.5 Customer satisfaction

FÁS customers generally express satisfaction with the service provision offered. They appreciate appointments, the quality of one-to-one interviews, individual ESOs, and help with completing forms. This result is somewhat surprising given that the placement outcomes for many customers are remote from the labour market or of uncertain status. Staff, in contrast, would like to offer a more concerted effort to a focused group of customers with disabilities and to avail of greater expertise in providing advice.

5.6 Customer dissatisfaction

Some FÁS offices have yet to complete their physical accessibility. The capacity of FÁS to engage with hearing impaired customers is unclear.¹⁴ The use of in-house video conferencing with Irish sign interpretation may break through barriers here. There is frustration among some customers outside Dublin at assessments and waiting lists for mainstream training.

¹³ Half of hearing impaired respondents, in a small survey of the deaf community, found their jobs privately. Source: See also C. Grehan and J.B. Conama (2002) *'Is there poverty in the Deaf Community?'*, Dublin, Irish Deaf Society.

¹⁴ A similar view was raised regarding a lack of communication facilities for the hearing impaired in a Disability Allowance Customer Survey, August 2001. Department of Social Welfare, Disability Allowance Section, Longford. See also C. Grehan and J.B. Conama (2002) *'Is there poverty in the Deaf Community?'*, Dublin, Irish Deaf Society.

5.7 Accommodations and adaptations

Neither the majority of customers nor staff revealed hands-on familiarity with the practice of accommodating customers with disabilities to enable them to avail of mainstream training. ESOs are not expected nor have they been trained in assistive devices/assistive technology and technical adaptations. The customers for their part are unlikely to have seen, used or experienced accommodations and adaptations in recent years according to the CSO survey.¹⁵ This issue will be handled through FÁS case conferencing.

5.8 Offering choices to customers

A proportion of FÁS customers plan to remain economically inactive or are tentatively testing the waters in labour market integration. Such customers are uncertain as to what is possible and may have low levels of formal education and little recent full-time labour market experience. (See Table 3) The shrinking of community employment scheme places, the absence of several special needs training providers in some regions, and the low numbers of work-experience placements, may be markedly reducing the choices of such customers. Perceptions might indicate that there is a shortage in supply of personal assistants (from other public services) and job coaches, which can be a further factor in the rate of opening up of supported employment places. This is an indicative rather than a firm conclusion.

¹⁵ Quarterly National Household Survey, Disability in the Labour Force, 2002, CSO, 28 November, 2002.

5.9 Placement outcomes for FÁS customers

Table 5 Placement Outcomes as viewed by FÁS Interviewees

Region	Placed on a job	Placed on a course	Placed on a scheme	Not Applicable	Not placed	Other
Dublin	6	11	5	-	9	-
Limerick	-	1	6	-	8	1
Galway	1	2	1	2	6	-
Cork	2	3	-	-	6	-
Total	9	17	12	2	29	1

Source: FÁS Interviews 2002

N=68, Total number of placements amounts to 70. Some Customers were placed more than once.

In Galway and Cork, the customers who stated that they were unable to work, were not placed on a job, course or a scheme (see table 5). In Limerick, the majority were not placed on a job, course or a scheme. However a few customers were placed on courses or schemes and in one case the registrant was placed in a sheltered workshop. In Dublin, the majority were placed on a course or a scheme. A minority of cases were not placed. Policy differed from one region to another. In Cork, the policy is to place registrants, the end result to find employment and be economically active. If the registrant cannot work then a placement cannot be offered. The registrant must be progression ready (able to enter the labour market).

5.10 Customers with a history of mental health difficulties

Customers with a history of mental health difficulties figure among the customers of FÁS. FÁS staff report concerns that they do not have the knowledge base to advise some customers as to their best vocational plan.

5.11 The management of disability by FÁS

Some staff consider that FÁS could be more proactive in 'selling' its new mainstreaming approach to disability to the general public. They would appreciate more training in hands-on disability issues, more expert back-up at a central level and regional level, and an understanding of how disability issues articulate inside training centres. Some customers in contrast are interested in more follow-up.

Chapter 6

Recommendations

The recommendations which follow are drawn from chapter 5 – Analysis and Conclusions and the survey findings and suggested actions, as summarised in Appendix 4.

6.1 Identifying the customer

FÁS might review the criteria for composition of its case listings of customers with disabilities. Such a review would ensure that the listings contain those clients who have disclosed, or been invited to disclose, a disability which impacts on their opportunities.

6.2 Communicating to potential customers

A more pro-active communication to customers with disabilities, or customers with specific disabilities, is justified on the basis of FÁS' existing investment in staff training, manuals, programmes, and other measures implementing the principle of service mainstreaming.

6.3 Management of disability

FÁS might make available to front-line staff expertise or case conferences for customers with disabilities remote from the labour market and at risk of exclusion due to accumulated difficulties with integration. Customers with disability and a history of substance abuse, criminal convictions or multiple hospitalisations face exceptional placement issues.

6.4 Customers Interview with FÁS

FÁS might discuss the specific supports registrants might need to pursue a training or integration option, and explore the impact impairments might have on their training/placement participation or the accommodations/ adjustments that might allow for fuller participation.

6.5 Handling of Social Welfare Benefits¹⁶

FÁS should keep under review the new system whereby customers with low literacy levels, psychological disorientation or difficulties with transport handle their own social welfare exemption documentation.

6.6 The FÁS customers disability client base

FÁS should offer specific measures to those with a disability or long standing health condition. Some individuals with non-disabling impairments or short-term health conditions appear to be offered the benefit of specific measures for which they have no exceptional need. FÁS should consider specific outreach to customers with hearing and sight impairments.¹⁷

6.7 Accommodations and Adaptations

FÁS should explore further its responsibility to customers who need guidance on adaptation and assistive devices, or low cost/no cost adjustments to participate in the workforce and vocational training.

6.8 Follow-up

The issue of follow-up of customers applies to a range of customers with disabilities. Customers with disabilities are among those who would appreciate some selective follow-up. This topic should be reviewed in the context of the overall FÁS policy of follow-up.

6.9 Customer ‘word-of-mouth’

Since many customers with disabilities would recommend FÁS to someone else, customer ‘word-of-mouth’ should be activated to reach out to customers with disabilities.

¹⁶ This is an issue external to FÁS.

¹⁷ While FÁS staff have never been trained nor are they expected to know about accommodations and adaptations. This reveals a gap for the customer.

Appendix 1

Additional Methodological Material

A.1 The choice of method

Unlike its quantitative counterpart, which almost always sets out to provide a numerical measure of some kind, more in-depth attitudinal research requires a quantitative approach in which the primary aim is to understand rather than measure.

A.2 The survey population

In conformity with the Data Protection Act, 1998, the lists of persons contained no details whatsoever of the persons background, educational experiences, impairment or injury or personal details.

A.3 The Questionnaire

Other sources of guidance in compiling a questionnaire included examining questions and sections put in other recent user/customer surveys on disability in Ireland.

These latter included:

- Shannon Workshop 2001 survey with People with Disabilities Ireland, Co Clare,
- Kerry People with Disabilities needs survey, 2001,
- Central Statistics Office, Household Survey, section on principal economic status,
- Central Statistics Office, Census 2002, sections on disability,
- Local Government Management Services Board, Pilot Survey questions on disability,
- Department of Finance, Civil Service Equality Unit, Disability Survey 2001, (unpublished)
- Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform and Equality Authority, study on the effective recruitment of people with disabilities in the public service, 2001.

The questionnaire was designed to be completed in 40 minutes by interviewers. It contained a mix of open-ended and closed questions and space for customers to comment on many topics if they so wished. Questions followed a sequence on the following topics:

- Demographic information about interviewee,
- Experiences/satisfaction of registration, completing registration forms and interview(s),
- Experiences/satisfaction with job/training/placement,
- Experiences of/satisfaction with adjustments and accommodations,
- Overall opinions/views of FÁS views of FÁS experiences.

A.4 The Interviewers

For example, one interviewer had extensive experience of the field of intellectual disability and one had experience of the field of psychological difficulties. All of the interviewers were very pleased to have the opportunity to participate in what they perceived as an important exercise in exploring the views of customers who might be at some distance from the labour market. The inclusion in the survey of people residing in rural and outlying areas was regarded as an important feature by the interview team.

Interviewees were offered the facility of being interviewed in Irish in the Galway region. This was availed of by one customer, for whom Irish was their first language.

A.5 Briefing of interviewers

Interviewers were briefed with folders of materials provided by FÁS on employment services, technical information, descriptions of specific impairments, written inventories of reasonable accommodations, and guidance materials for training staff. Specific briefing on contacts with interviewees, interview locations and accommodations were provided in writing and by phone.

It was stressed in the briefing that the Survey was intended to elicit the views of a specific tranche of customers and was not intended as an evaluation exercise of FÁS, of vocational training or employment services. Interviewers were provided with printed sheets for each interviewee containing a two paragraph description of the survey and names and addresses for contact about the survey at FÁS and at Ralaheen Ltd to respond to queries or concerns.

A.6 Fieldwork locations

The fieldwork took place in November 2002 in all locations simultaneously. Interviews took place in inner city, suburban, town, and townland locations.

The Customer Survey went out to the interviewees' neighbourhood of work or residence, getting as close as possible to locations convenient to the customer. It was anticipated that customers with impairments such as MS, or back or spinal injuries might not wish to travel far, if at all. Two customers asked to be interviewed by phone. This was done. It was anticipated that some interviewees with intellectual impairments would be interviewed in the presence of parents, carers, job coaches or guardians. This turned out to be the case. Interviewers were advised to offer cab or taxi fares to reasonably accommodate customers who wished to be interviewed outside their homes/work/centres in accessible locations. Interviews took place in customer homes, local cafes, hotels/shopping centres, day care and youth centres.

A.7 Contacts with interviewees

In making contact with potential interviewees, interviewers made contact with 184 contacts/persons using 28 different offices. (See Appendix 2) The following situations were encountered:

- Change of address, no follow-up phone number available/provided,
- Customer could not be contacted,
- Customer contacted, declined to be interviewed,
- Interview appointment made, customer failed to show up,
- Interview appointment made, customer phoned in sick,
- Customer said that they did not have a 'disability' but a temporary illness/injury and agreed to be interviewed,
- Parent of customer answered the phone and declined without asking the customer,
- Customer accepted, parent subsequently intervened to decline interview,
- Customer not aware she had been a user of FÁS; registered by an advocate.

Several customers appreciated being personally contacted to provide feedback on their experiences. Customers appreciated being 'remembered', appreciated personalised phone calls to invite them for an interview. A customer wrote:

"I have had the pleasure of meeting (interviewer) re FÁS Disability Survey...I want to thank you for your interest in helping people like myself with a disability."

A.8 The conduct of the interviews

Interviews lasted from 40 minutes to one hour. Some customers extended hospitality to interviewers, offering tea or coffee in their homes. Interviews took place in an informal atmosphere sitting around a kitchen table or coffee bar.

In the case of some persons with intellectual impairments, a carer, advocate or support person was present throughout the interview. Some of the questions demanding recall of past events and experience of usage of particular services proved complex and difficult for some users with intellectual impairments.

A.9 Limitations of the research method

The research method is open to a number of limitations, the principal of which are mentioned below:

- The Survey interview asks customers to ‘think back’ over a period of time and recall their feelings/experiences at that time. This recall process is open to the risk of distortion. Users may feel less or more satisfied with the benefit of hindsight.
- The purpose of this particular study was to get a snapshot in time of this particular client groups’ views on FÁS services for people with disabilities.
- Disability is self-defined for some users. Such a definition may not coincide with the definitions used in service provision. Persons with acquired short-term health conditions may be temporarily impaired alongside persons with long-term deteriorating conditions. Customers with impairments with a slightly disabling impact are in a survey population group alongside persons whose impairments impact significantly on their labour market participation.
- The risk that those who declined to be interviewed constituted a discrete sub-group whose experiences have not been taken into account, faces many surveys. This risk was reduced by engaging trained or experienced interviewers, employing interviewers sensitive to the topic, ensuring interviewers presented close to the customer’s neighbourhood, providing reasonable accommodation on transport, offering both male and female interviewers and allowing some persons to be interviewed in Irish if they so wished. Despite this, some persons with particular types of impairment may have been more likely to decline to be interviewed. One such ‘group’ is persons with intellectual impairments living at home or in residential institutions.

Appendix 2

FÁS Offices cited by users in study

Region of user	Number of Offices used	Listing of Offices used in each Region
Galway	6	Beside Cathedral Buildings Nuns Island Oughterard Claremorris Tuam Eyre Court
Limerick	3	NewCastle West Limerick City Athlone
Cork	5	George's Quay Bishopstown Shandon Street Holly Hill Sullivan's Quay
Dublin	14	Blanchardstown Dun Laoghaire Loughlinstown Northside Swords Crumlin Baggot Street Rathfarnham Bray D'Olier Street Baldoyle Finglas Tallaght Jervis street

Total = 28

Source: FÁS Interviews 2002

N=68

Appendix 3
Inaccessible Offices as Reported by FÁS Customers

Location cited	Reason Given by Customer
Limerick City Office	Problem with the door
Newcastle West, Limerick	Not easy to access the building No other explanation given
George's Quay, Cork	Problem with parking
Finglas, Dublin	Not wheelchair accessible
Swords, Dublin	Not wheelchair accessible
Jervis Street, Dublin	At the time, not wheelchair accessible. The Office is now wheelchair accessible.

Appendix 4

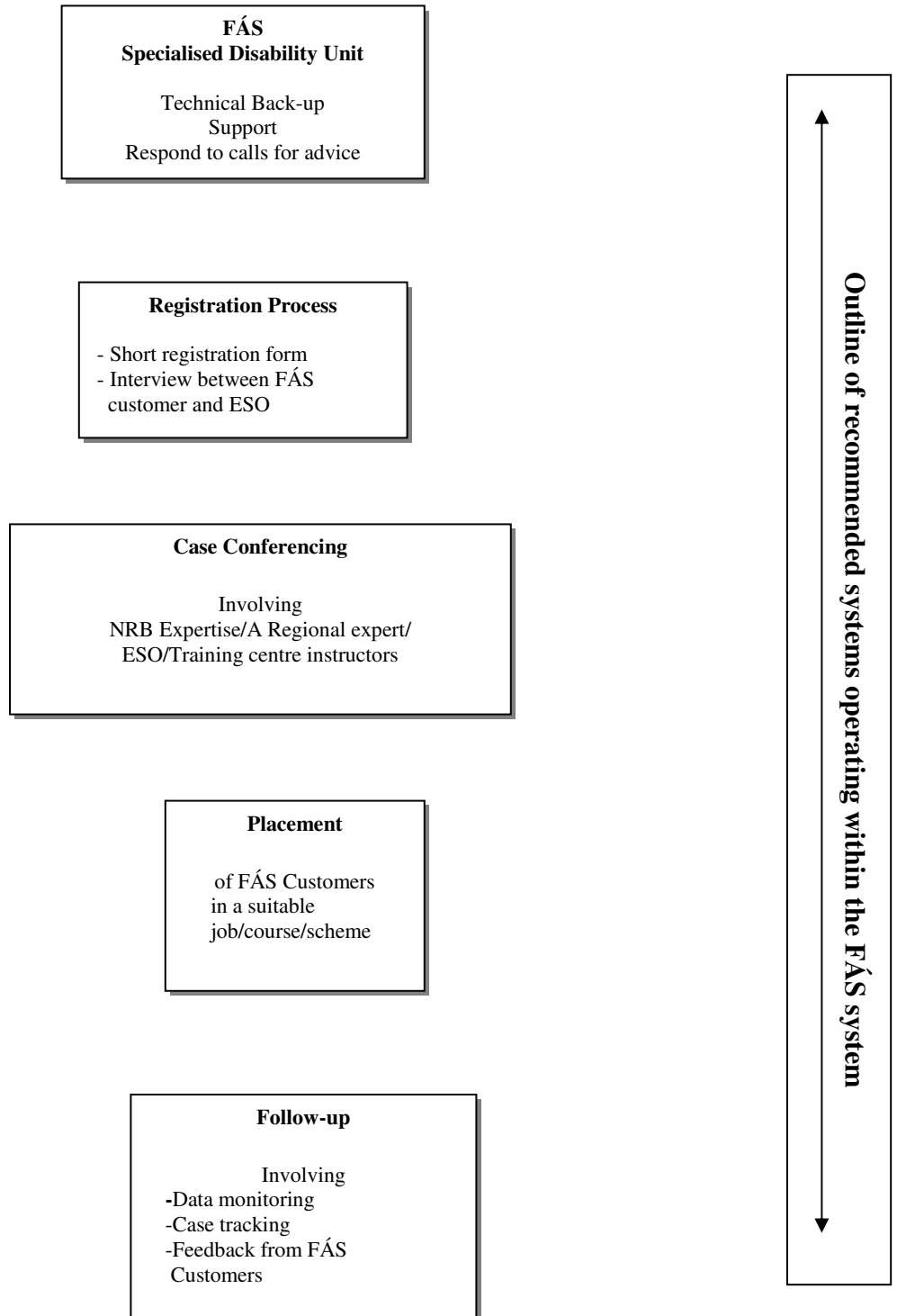
Summary of Findings

FÁS Customer Service system as reported by customers collectively	Issues raised at each stage of the service	Actions suggested by staff and customers
<p style="text-align: center;">Stage 1</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Registration process</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disclosure of disability difficult for customer resulting in self declaration issues • Apprehension to inquire about the nature of the customers disability • Length of registration form too long • Issues raised by customers with a history of mental illness or psychiatric hospitalisation very complex to handle • Social Welfare benefit status should be a special needs registration trigger 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use NRB staff expertise • More expertise needed • More hands on training needed in handling and addressing disclosure
<p style="text-align: center;">Stage 2</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Placement of Customer on a Job/Course/ Scheme</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unforeseen commuting needs for customers and some customers could not travel to training centres on the bus • Training Centre waiting lists • Customers may not pass course assessments • No quick result from registration • Matching commuting/course content and course level proved quite complex for placement staff • Placement of clients with intellectual impairments whose productivity would be less than 100 per cent posed economic and mathematical calculations for staff. The task was time consuming and perplexing • Only one special needs trainer provided - no other choices available • Lack of training for call centre staff in the midlands 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expert managed case conferencing essential and a priority for FÁS • More case conferencing needed • An expert to be designated to each region • More involvement with training centre instructors • Customised training fund could be highlighted • Clients with low literacy levels, psychological disorientation or difficulties with transport find the exemption process very difficult resulting in placement delays because of this bureaucratic obstacle

FÁS Customer Service system as reported by customers collectively	Issues raised at each stage of the service	Actions suggested by staff and customers
<p style="text-align: center;">Stage 3</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Follow -up</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ESOs 'lost sight' of the client on waiting lists for training or in Health Board/not-for profit supported placements • Some customers were shopping for choices across the city and did not want to be referred back to offices or training centres in their locality • Level of follow-up undertaken was further connected to the 'capping of case loads' for ESOs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ESOs felt that follow-up of placement outcomes of customers with disabilities was relatively unknown and that the time is right to examine this stage of the process

Appendix 5

Summary Outline of Process Recommended by ESOs



Appendix 6
Survey Questionnaire